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ABSTRACT

This document reports the findings of a survey of the academic, social, counseling, and language needs of Vietnamese high school students in San Diego (California). All 311 Vietnamese students in grades 10 and 11 at three high schools responded. The following summary findings are presented: (1) students perceive their school experiences to be positive; (2) students do well academically in all subject areas, but especially in those areas where English is not critical to success; (3) both students and their parents expect that students will pursue postsecondary education; (4) students are well socialized; (5) students often have family responsibilities that interfere with their current schooling and limit options for postsecondary education; (6) students may not have the necessary language proficiency or financial resources to attend the college of their choice; (7) nearly all students experience some discrimination from students and teachers, and, to a lesser extent, from counselors; (8) although students perceive that their parents are interested in their education, they report that their parents do not meet their teachers or participate in parent-community activities; (9) students worry most about the future; (10) students practice and value their cultural customs and feel they need education directed to more understanding of their culture and history; and (11) students and parents need more information about postsecondary education options. Statistical data are presented in three tables. A list of three references is appended. (FMW)

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A SURVEY OF SENIOR HIGH VIETNAMESE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS AND NEEDS*

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A SURVEY OF HIGH SCHOOL VIETNAMESE STUDENTS' SCHOOL PERCEPTIONS AND NEEDS

ISSUE

Like several school districts in California, Florida and elsewhere around the country San Diego has had an increasing influx of Southeast Asian students during the last decade. Vietnamese student enrollment comprises the largest racial/ethnic group of the Southeast Asian population in San Diego City Schools. While many Vietnamese students are successful in school, there are many who are dropping out of school. The district sought information about Vietnamese students in order to better meet their needs.

BACKGROUND

The first study to provide adequately detailed data on various Asian subgroups, including Vietnamese, was the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS.88), according to researchers Ralph M. Lee and Samuel S. Peng, commenting at a recent NABE conference. They conclude from these data that the model-student stereotype so prevalent for Asian students "may mask some serious problems among Asian-American students that urgently need attention." Activists from organizations representing Asian groups complain that, despite the size and diversity of their population, their children have received little attention from the education establishment and have been lumped together under a few stereotypes that lead school officials to misunderstand their needs (Schmidt, 1991).

Ms. Yao. of OBEMLA has said that where students fall on the achievement curve "is a function largely of their families' socioeconomic status, the education level of their families when they arrived in the United States, and the number of years or generations their families have lived here." Other activists also have noted that the educational agenda of a given Asian ethnic group tends to be influenced by the length of time its members have been in the United States (Schmidt, 1991). For example, those who arrived several generations ago give priority to issues of "inclusion," such as the representation of their ethnic group in textbooks. Newer immigrant groups tend to stress language issues. Bilingual education, however, has not been desired by many Asian-American parents until the advent of more recent research, which has attributed the weakening of Asian-American family structures to children's loss of their native language.

Some previous studies have had a sociological perspective regarding the adjustment of students and their families, which is relevant to this study . The Vietnamese culture reflects high levels of discipline and orientation towards education. Vietnamese are more likely to employ collective solutions to problems through extended

family contributions than are other Southeast Asian groups. These factors are thought to contribute to their high academic achievement (Rumbaut, Ima, 1990).

The Vietnamese student population has been studied in San Diego County but not specifically in San Diego City Schools. The literature review indicated that on all academic measures including GPA, achievement in mathematics and reading, Vietnamese and Chinese-Vietnamese, as a group, are among the top students in San Diego area high schools. They outperform all racial/ethnic groups in academic achievement as measured by GPA, have solid math achievement scores, show improving language proficiency, and have a high rate of admissions to colleges and universities. Among the main problem areas for Vietnamese is that students who do not come from intact or functional families often become high-risk youth and may drop out of school and/or experience conflict with school and police officials. A second problem is that even those Vietnamese who continue into post-secondary education sometimes do so with English language deficiencies that may be addressed inadequately by their schooling and the students themselves.

The prevailing views summarized above provide more than sufficient reason, together with the locally identified needs, to study Southeast Asian students, and the specific needs of its subgroups. The present study sought information on Vietnamese students' academic, social, counseling and language needs in and out of the classroom, and the services sought to meet those needs.

METHODOLOGY

Instrument. An extensive survey composed of 70 multiple-choice questions and three open-ended questions was designed by the researchers to obtain information in a number of broad areas, including demographic information; school environment and perceptions; English language skills and language habits; home, habits and future expectations; and, beliefs and concerns. The survey was offered in both English and Vietnamese. Students had the option of responding in the language of their choice. Vietnamese translators were available to assist during administration of the survey.

Collaborative Review Process. An evaluation advisory committee of persons from the school district, local universities, and community groups who were knowledgeable about the Vietnamese culture was convened. The advisory group identified key issues and concerns for study. A second evaluation committee consisting of persons nominated by the advisory committee reviewed the survey items developed by the researchers in what became a three-step review process involving collaboration between the researchers and stakeholders in the evaluation. The survey was then piloted with young Vietnamese instructional aides who would subsequently administer it to students. Further revisions were made as a result of their responses and suggestions.

In spring 1990, the survey was administered in group settings at each of the three district high schools. Three individuals who were bilingual in English and Vietnamese and had education and experience that leant the necessary skills for building rapport with Vietnamese students received appropriate training and administered the survey.

High School Populations. Summary statistics relating to the three district high schools in the evaluation study are presented below for 1989-90. The actual names of the high schools are not used in this paper.

Cleveland High School had a student enrollment of 1,530 with 26.8 percent Indochinese (Cambodian, Laotian, Vietnamese). Thirty-nine percent of students took the SAT and 26 percent were enrolled in Advanced Placement courses. Approximately 70 percent of graduating students continued their education at either two-year or four-year colleges or universities. The percent of tenth grade students who performed at or above the fiftieth percentile on the spring 1990 CTBS testing was 41.5 percent in reading; 59.5 percent in language; and, 70.6 percent in mathematics. At Cleveland, 27 percent of students qualified for free/reduced lunches.

Hancock High School had a student enrollment of 1,900 with 33.1 percent Indochinese. Eleven percent of students took the SAT and five percent were enrolled in Advanced Placement courses. Slightly less than 20 percent went on to post secondary education. The percent of tenth grade students who performed at or above the fiftieth percentile on the spring 1990 CTBS testing was 31.6 percent in reading; 42.0 percent in language; and, 65.1 percent in mathematics. At Hancock, 43.6 percent of students qualified for free/reduced lunches.

Kennedy High School had a student enrollment of 1,184 with 29.6 percent Indochinese. The percent of tenth grade students who performed at or above the fiftieth percentile on the spring 1990 CTBS testing was 33.5 percent in reading; 55.5 percent in language; and, 72.5 percent in mathematics. At Kennedy, 29.4 percent of students qualified for free/reduced lunches.

Sample Studied. The researchers attempted to survey all Vietnamese students in grades 10 and 11 at three high schools in San Diego City Schools with the heaviest concentrations of Vietnamese students. Vietnamese students were identified using school site records. The sample consisted of 311 grade 10 and 11 Vietnamese students; 75 were Chinese-Vietnamese and 230 were Vietnamese. Of the students surveyed, 30.0 percent (93 students) were enrolled at Cleveland; 43.7 percent (136 students) were at Hancock; and, 26.3 percent (82 students) were at Kennedy High School.

RESULTS

The present study sought information on Vietnamese students' academic, social, counseling and language needs in and out of the classroom. The survey data are presented which describe background and demographic characteristics; school perceptions; and students' beliefs and plans.

Background and Demographic Characteristics

For the survey respondents, 17 years was the median age. The respondents were equally divided among grades 10 and 11 and by gender. Of the total students, 307 students reported that they were born in Vietnam, and 2 were born in the United States. Thirty-eight percent arrived in the United States within the last three years and San Diego was the first city of resettlement for 69 percent of the students. Over 50 percent of the students began school in San Diego at the secondary level, grades 7-12. Regarding absenteeism 72 percent report they were absent 1-8 days in the past school year.

The primary language was listed as English by 64 students and Vietnamese by 224 students. Nearly 70 percent of the respondents had been in an ESL class between 1-4 years. Fifty-one percent of the Vietnamese students reported that they speak mostly English in class, while only 23 percent speak mostly English with their friends outside of class. Thirty-seven percent of the students speak both English and Vietnamese in class and 39 percent speak both English and Vietnamese with their friends outside of class. Nearly 12 percent of the students speak mostly Vietnamese in class and 35 percent speak mostly Vietnamese with their friends outside of class. Table 1 shows correlation coefficients at a significant level of probability for the length of time spent in the United States compared with both the language mostly spoken in class and the ESL level of the student; and the language spoken in class compared with the language spoken outside with friends. These data imply that students who had been in the country for the shortest period of time tended to retain their use of Vietnamese, both in class and with their friends outside the classroom.

Table 1
Correlation Coefficients*, Comparing Length of Time in the Country, Languages Spoken, and ESL Level

		1.	2.	3.	4.
1.	Time in Country	1.00	-.27**	-.03	.48**
2.	Language in Class	-.27**	1.00	.28**	-.07
3.	Language with Friends	-.03	.28**	1.00	.17
4.	ESL Level	.48**	-.07	.17	1.00

* It must be noted that data are provided by responses to multiple choice questions. Response categories do not constitute equal interval data.
** Significant at $p < .001$

Seventy-four percent of the survey respondents indicated that they took days off from school to celebrate holidays unique to their culture. Of these students, 81 percent indicated that they took off one to three days annually from school. Sixty-three percent said that they felt a need for classes or activities that taught them about their own culture and history.

Sixty-one percent of the respondents indicated that they lived with both parents in the home; 22 percent indicated they lived with either their mother or father; and 12 percent indicated they lived with adult relatives or unrelated adults. Sixty-seven percent lived in a home with 2-3 rooms not counting the kitchen and bathrooms; 27 percent lived in 4-5 rooms. Sixty-seven percent indicated that between four to seven people lived in their homes.

School Perceptions

School experiences were reported to be predominantly positive: 87 percent of the respondents said that they have had an excellent, good or average experience. They reported that their grades are average to excellent and their ability to read English and to do math are average to excellent. Eighteen percent (56 students) indicated they were enrolled in advanced placement classes. Seventy-seven percent report that they like and respect all or most of their teachers while 67 percent report that their teachers respect them and their culture. Of the respondents, 60 percent said that they felt challenged by their teachers, while 40 percent did not feel so challenged. Sixty percent indicated that their teachers expect about the right amount from them and others (28 percent) said teachers expect too much.

The students said that teachers often (6 percent) or sometimes (62 percent) discriminate against them, while counselors discriminate less (10 percent and 36 percent in the same categories). Students

felt that other students often (25 percent) or sometimes (61 percent) discriminate against them.

Seventy-two percent of the students indicated that their parents or adults living with them in the home had not met the teachers. Slightly over 26 percent of the survey respondents related that their parents or adults living in the home did not know their most recent grades. Approximately 50 percent indicated that their parents or other adults in the home attended school meetings. Thirty-seven percent of the students reported that they determined their educational plans on their own; 24 percent indicated their parents/guardians determined their educational plans; and, 39 percent determined educational plans together with their parents.

Table 2 presents the results of a stepwise multiple regression analysis performed on survey items to predict Vietnamese students reporting positive school experiences. The R square of .47 indicates that 47 percent of the variance in reported positive school experiences can be explained by reported grades, math ability and being challenged by teachers. The strongest independent effect on the students' perception of positive school experiences was produced by the students reporting high grades.

Table 2
Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis:
Predicting School Experiences by Achievement Factors

Variables	Beta	t
Reported Grades	.49	6.51**
Math Ability	.15	2.40
Challenged by Teachers	.17	2.37

**Significant at $p < .001$
R =.68
R Square = .47

Table 3 presents the regression for predicting the students reported English reading ability. Reported grades explained most of the 54 percent of the variance in English reading ability, with knowledge of job training required for their future work and days absent from school contributing significantly. Negative betas were noted for number of schools attended, belief that the school was preparing them for the future, and the number of adults in the home.

Table 3
Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis:
Predicting English Reading Ability by Achievement Factors

Variables	Beta	t
Reported Grades	.36	5.69**
Schools Attended	-.20	-3.00
Job Training	.23	3.93**
Days Absent	-.24	-3.95**
Achieving Goals	.21	3.76
Challenged by Teachers	.17	2.84
School Preparation	-.12	-2.12
Extracurricular	.18	2.83
Adults in Home	-.15	-2.55
Living Situation	.12	2.05

** Significant at $p < .001$
R = .76
R Square = . 57

Students' Beliefs, Plans, and Concerns

The survey's results showed that 94.2 percent of the respondents indicated that they planned to graduate from high school. Ten percent of the Hancock students indicated that they did not plan to graduate compared to three percent at Cleveland and one percent at Kennedy. Following high school graduation, 64.7 percent of the respondents indicated that they know the type of work they want to do; 52.4 percent said they know the type of training required; and, 40.1 percent indicated they know someone who does that kind of work.

Eighty-seven percent of students said that high school was preparing them for life. At Cleveland, 47.8 percent of the survey respondents agreed that school was preparing them for life; at Hancock, 37.6 percent, and at Kennedy, 35.4 percent. Among all respondents 79.9 percent indicated that they planned to attend a four-year college or community college after high school graduation; 9.5 percent indicated they planned to attend a trade school or business college with the remaining split between job for pay or job with a family business, or marriage. Ninety percent of respondents agreed that educational and job opportunities in America are open to all and 82.6 percent believed that not doing well in high school restricts one's job opportunities.

In an open-ended question, respondents were asked to list the kinds of things that concerned or worried them. Students had the option to respond in English or Vietnamese. Slightly over six percent of the responses indicated that the respondents did not have any worries to report. The responses to the question were analyzed for

main recurrent themes and based on this analysis coded into the following categories: post high school experiences; education and grades; family concerns and money issues; and general concerns related to emotional, safety, and health issues. Themes pertaining to lack of money and inadequate finances, poor English-speaking abilities, and family problems were pervasive through all of the main categories.

Concerns about post high school including college admissions, jobs, and success in adult life was the main category of responses for the Vietnamese students who took the survey. A positive correlation at the .001 level of significance was noted for students who reported conferences with their school counselor regarding their education and work goals and those who reported they knew the type of work they planned to do following high school. Nearly one-third of the students expressed concerns about what would happen after graduation. Reflected in their responses was a fear of being able to acquire the necessary course work and training for college while in high school, unknown future and lack of awareness of the post high school experiences that are available in the United States, poor English-speaking abilities, financial/economic worries about how to afford college, concerns about meeting their parents' expectations, and worries about their families and finances. The students' quotations are taken directly from the survey.

> "I worry about my English. I don't know how well I will do in college when it comes to writing English and understanding it."

> "I worry about my future, my future education. I don't know if my education will be progressing appropriately. My present anxiety is English performance. It is not clearly well done."

> "I worry about my future and wish to have somebody to guide me in choosing a good professio.. so I will try to study for getting it."

The majority of the survey respondents (79.9 percent) indicated that they held an expectation they would attend college after high school. Regarding meeting qualifications for college, one of their greatest concerns was a real uncertainty about their grades in high school. Slightly over 26 percent of the respondents indicated that they had concerns about their academic grades, whether or not they meet graduation requirements, and their limited ability in English and its affect on grades. Illustrative comments are provided below.

> "The thing that worries me is would not be capable to graduate because the school gives me many very difficult assignments."

"I am scare cannot graduate in high school, because I don't have more credit to graduate in high school."

Nearly 25 percent of the respondents had worries about their families and money issues. Their concerns about families concerned family members who remained in Vietnam, health status of their relatives, emotional turmoil in families, and worries about younger brothers and sisters doing poorly in school or becoming involved with gangs. Money matters loomed as a primary concern for many respondents. They stated that money was an issue at home for basic family needs and health care as well as needed to achieve their own goals. One-third of the respondents indicated that they held a job for pay outside of the home. Of these students, 50 percent were enrolled at Hancock. Some students indicated that their parents were still in Vietnam.

"I worry about the happiness between my mom and dad. I worry about the difficulties of my father. I worry about my score dropping. I worry about my mom's illness and lack of monies."

"Worry if my parents can get to come to U.S. and worry for parent health."

One student expressed frustration because of being at an age where he could be earning money to help out but was still in school. Such concern is illustrated in the following quote:

"Things that worry me are jobs to have while I am attending high school. The reason is I will be 18 years old within 1 month. I still have 2 years to be in high school."

Seventy-four percent of the survey respondents said that they had responsibility for the care of younger siblings. Many indicated that they were taking a high level of responsibility for their families' well-being and unity which was affecting their schooling as illustrated by the following comments.

"The things that worries me the most is the reunion of my family because I am the oldest child of my family. I have to carry the responsibility of a mother and sister. I have to arrange my time and seek for opportunities to have job for helping my family. At school, English is still my big problem. So my goal to become a teacher or to have other professions become more difficult. Because of my family situation, I do not have any firm resolution for my future.

Becoming a teacher is only a vague idea. I am not sure."
"Not having enough time to do homework & study because I have to do housework, cooking. Not knowing enough about real life."

"That little brother and sister grow up in a wrong way."

While others were concerned that their limited English proficiency was negatively impacting their ability to provide for their families.

"I am a NES (Non English Speaking student). I have no money to help my family."

"I worry about my English skills, so I will try to speak English well to help my family."

"Things that worry me are: my English skills are not good enough. My family is not well settled. I don't know anything about the future."

The category of general topics and worries related to emotional, safety, and health issues represented approximately 10 percent of responses. Emotional issues pertained primarily to loneliness because of lack of English skills, no one available to help with school problems or preparation for the future, and peer relationships. Several student responses follow.

"I am very sad because I am so ignorant. I wish..."

"I miss my native land. I am so lonely."

"I cannot catch up in my learning with my friends."

Safety issues related mainly to drugs, gangs and fear of retaliation. Only 55 percent of survey respondents felt that they lived in a safe neighborhood. Fifty-two percent indicated that they had fears about being asked to become a gang member. Eleven percent said that they had been in trouble with the police. On items related to whether or not they smoked, drank alcoholic beverages, or took drugs, six percent or less gave "yes" as a response. Illustrative comments concerning safety concerns are given below.

"What worries me is that, we Asian are involved in gang activities and gun shootings in near by neighborhood."

"The thing that worry about me is that when I get into a fight with my friends and then they want to get revenge and then they go to my family."

"The things that worry me are violence, crime and if I'm going to be that person I want to be in life."

Health related worries were about pregnancy and needing medical attention but not having adequate finances.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND EDUCATIONAL IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

Based on findings from this study the following needs of Vietnamese students have been identified in academic, social, counseling and language areas:

- Students perceive their school experiences to be positive. They like their teachers and counselors and the majority feel challenged in their classes.
- They do well academically in all subject areas, and especially in subjects where command of English is not critical to success.
- Students as well as their parents hold the expectation that they will attend a four-year college or community college following high school graduation.
- Students are well socialized and have many friends and contacts within their own ethnic groups.
- Students often have related family responsibilities that interfere with their current schooling and limit their options for post-secondary education.
- Students may not have the necessary language proficiency or financial resources to attend the college of their choice.
- Nearly all students experience some discrimination in the school setting on the basis of their culture from students and teachers, and, to a lesser extent, from counselors.
- Students perceive that their parents are interested in their education and grades, but say that they do not go to school to meet their teachers or participate in parent/community activities.
- Students worry most about their future, whether it be college admission, jobs, or success in adult life. Many also worry about their ability to compete, given their

levels of English mastery. Finances are of major concern.

- Students practice and value their cultural customs and feel they need education specifically directed to more understanding of their culture and history.

- Students and their parents need more information about post-secondary school options and how to achieve them.

In this era of ever-increasing influxes of students from other countries who are often of limited English-speaking skill, school districts need to find better ways of helping these students to meet their needs so as to become participating, productive and fulfilled citizens. Studies such as this explore methodologies for identifying needs of such populations besides providing specific data about Vietnamese students in San Diego. It is the intent of the authors to make the survey instrument available to interested parties. The instrument has transferability for use in studying other population's educational needs.

Based on results and analysis of survey information interviews of students and their parents need to be designed to further support and illuminate findings. A selected sample of teachers and counselors need to be surveyed to further increase the breadth and understanding of data, and to solicit their ideas and solutions in the areas of language, discrimination, parent involvement, post-secondary options, and access to community agencies and resources.

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